Friendly Combat Casualties and Operational Narratives

A Monograph

by

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A complex relationship exists between friendly combat casualties and public support, in the context of 21st century limited wars. A myth persists that Western civilian populations are casualty phobic, and as such military leaders are often risk-averse. In reality, the public responds in a much more nuanced way, and in general terms makes a rational cost-benefit analysis of the use of military force to achieve policy options. Military planners must understand the relationship between casualties and public support, and comprehend the critical importance of narrative in supporting or undermining national will. A gap exists in doctrine regarding friendly combat casualties, between risk management at the tactical level and narrative creation and communication at the strategic level. To bridge the gap, the author proposes the term "operational narrative," as a means of conceptualizing the way that tactical actions must link to strategy to support a war narrative. Using operational narrative and a modified form of risk management doctrine, operational leaders can make better decisions about the risks that friendly combat casualties pose to strategic success.

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Abstract

Friendly Combat Casualties and Operational Narratives, by Major Errol G. MacEachern, 44 pages.

A complex relationship exists between friendly combat casualties and public support, in the context of 21st century limited wars. A myth persists that Western civilian populations are casualty phobic, and as such military leaders are often risk-averse. In reality, the public responds in a much more nuanced way, and in general terms makes a rational cost-benefit analysis of the use of military force to achieve policy options. Military planners must understand the relationship between casualties and public support, and comprehend the critical importance of narrative in supporting or undermining national will. A gap exists in doctrine regarding friendly combat casualties, between risk management at the tactical level and narrative creation and communication at the strategic level. To bridge the gap, the author proposes the term "operational narrative," as a means of conceptualizing the way that tactical actions must link to strategy to support a war narrative. Using operational narrative and a modified form of risk management doctrine, operational leaders can make better decisions about the risks that friendly combat casualties pose to strategic success.

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Acronyms

ADM   Army Design Methodology

ADP   Army Doctrine Publication

ADRP   Army Doctrine Reference Publication

ATP   Army Techniques Publication

ATTP   Army Tactics, Techniques and Procedures

CA   Canadian Army

CAF   Canadian Armed Forces

CDS   Chief of the Defence Staff

CMTC   Canadian Manoeuvre Training Centre

COA   Course Of Action

IED   Improvised Explosive Device

IO   Information Operations

ISAF   International Security Assistance Force

JP   Joint Publication

KIA   Killed In Action

MDMP   Military Decision Making Process

METT-TC   Mission, Enemy, Terrain and weather, Troops, Time available, and Civil considerations

MNC-I   Multinational Corps - Iraq

MNF-I   Multinational Force - Iraq

NATO   North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OEF   Operation Enduring Freedom

ORM   Operational Risk Management

PPCLI	Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RCR	Royal Canadian Regiment
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WIA	Wounded In Action

Introduction

The genesis of this monograph was the author's experience working as the G3 of the Canadian Manoeuvre Training Centre (CMTC). CMTC is roughly similar to the United States Army's National Training Center, with a mission to conduct large-scale exercises for units preparing for operations, including the final validation exercise for the Canadian Army's high-readiness task force. Each of these final exercises is approximately eighteen days long and is conducted in as realistic a manner as possible, employing actors to simulate civilians in the battlespace and a laser-based system to simulate the effects of all sorts of weapons. This simulation system computes casualties during engagements and tracks the number of personnel killed or wounded over the course of each exercise. During two iterations of high-readiness exercises, the author witnessed Canadian task forces suffer in excess of 150 personnel killed, and a significantly higher number of personnel wounded. These casualties were addressed in a tactical sense because exercise rules demanded that they be processed by the casualty system. However, during the exercises there was little recognition of the enormous impact that suffering those casualties would have had at the strategic level, and what that would have meant for Canadian political and strategic decision-making. During the entirety of Canada's frontline involvement in the conflict in Afghanistan, 158 Canadian soldiers lost their lives.[1] If the same number of Canadian soldiers died in eighteen days, it is likely that there would be a powerful strategic impact. However, there seems to be little understanding of what the specifics of that impact would be, and what its ramifications would be for future tactical actions. The scenario described above represents a failure in operational art. This monograph, more than anything, highlights the gap in analysis that exists between the response to casualties at the tactical level–through risk management and after-the-fact casualty treatment–and at the strategic level where they represent

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[1] Icasualties.org, "Canadian Casualties.," last modified 2015, accessed March 8, 2015, http://icasualties.org/OEF/Nationality.aspx?hndQry=Canada.

clear feedback on the appropriateness and efficacy of military strategy. There remains a serious shortcoming in the way that the literature, and as a consequence doctrine, approaches the problem of casualties from an operational perspective. The research for this monograph reveals very little in the way of guidance for operational commanders and staffs in the risk that dead and wounded present to strategic narratives, and by extension to national will. A corps commander cannot base his or her decisions on public opinion polls, but he or she also cannot afford to take a risk-intense approach to the conduct of limited war. Somewhere in the middle ground of this tension lies the problem explored by this monograph. This tension does not lend itself to easy quantification but it exists, and is therefore worthy of study and greater understanding.

A tension also exists between tactical actions conducted by military forces, and the strategic goals those actions are meant to support. Strategic goals exist in the policy sphere, which is unscientific, subjective, systemic, variable, and most importantly does not end at a specific point in time.[2] Tactical actions are the opposite: military planners seek to understand the battlefield fully and create precise tasks for subordinates for specific purposes, to achieve clear tactical successes. However, the accomplishment of any given mission may entail aspects of non-success, even if the mission is successful overall. Casualties represent one aspect of this dichotomy, and occupy the same zone of tension that operational art does. In the context of non-existential warfare, where narrative is central to the conceptualization of winning or losing, casualties are not just a cost, they are a failure of a sort. Sometimes, despite "success," the cost to the overall narrative of casualties is great enough to tip the scales and actually create "failure" as related to the narrative. When that happens the narrative breaks down because it fails to explain adequately to the public both the necessity of the mission and the effectiveness of the strategy used to accomplish. This is a complex subject, not well understood by many military planners.

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[2] Everett C. Dolman, *Pure Strategy* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 5.

Research Question

This monograph investigates the way that friendly combat casualties at the tactical level influence strategic success, especially with regards to national will, in the context of 21st century limited wars fought by Western democracies.

Hypothesis

A gap exists in US and Allied doctrine regarding friendly combat casualties, between risk management at the tactical level and narrative creation and communication at the strategic level. Understanding this gap better, and using elements of both aspects of existing doctrine, will allow for more appropriate decision-making by operational commanders and staffs in future conflicts.

Structure of the Argument

This investigation takes the following form. First, the monograph will examine the concepts of casualty aversion and casualty sensitivity. It is widely assumed that Western democracies are casualty averse, and that inflicting a sufficient number of military casualties will cause public opinion to turn against the conflict, and as a result force the withdrawal of military forces. Both politicians and pundits within Western democracies have made this argument, and enemies of the West have sought to capitalize on this supposed aversion to compensate for relative military weakness. This view is overly simplistic and in many cases demonstrably wrong. Acknowledging this, while casualty aversion is a myth as it is popularly understood in the military, populations are sensitive to casualties as indicators of both the appropriateness and effectiveness of conflicts of choice as government policies.

Next, the author will analyze the concept of narratives as they relate to casualties in modern conflicts. Narratives attempt to frame the appropriateness and feasibility of a military course of action in response to a public policy problem. Governments base their pre-war policy decisions on projected benefits and costs, while casualties represent actual costs compared against

real benefits. As such, narratives must explain and interpret events in wars as they occur, including casualties, in order for them to remain viable.

Two case studies illustrate this interaction. Operation *Al Fajr* (The Second Battle of Fallujah) represents a positive example of the use of narrative to explain combat casualties. By taking a proactive approach and focusing on the messages that they communicated to the domestic audience, senior military and political leaders were able to create a narrative that explained, in advance, the casualties that would result from intense fighting in Fallujah. As a result those casualties did not erode the national will; in fact for a brief period they resulted in an upswing in support for coalition operations in Iraq. A negative example of the use of narrative is Operation Medusa, the Canadian-led attack on Taliban insurgents in 2006. In many ways it bore a resemblance to Operation *Al Fajr* in its context, but the outcome in terms of narrative support to strategic aims was far different. The narrative that Canadian senior military and political leaders built around Canadian Army operations in Afghanistan in 2006 contrasted badly with the casualties that resulted from intense fighting against the Taliban in the summer and early fall of that year. As a result, the Canadian government's war narrative was undermined and public support for the mission as a whole plummeted. Despite some tactical successes, a concerted effort after the fact by the government of Canada to support the narrative, and widespread backing of the troops themselves, the combat mission never recovered public support.

Third, existing doctrine will be examined, revealing the way that Canadian and US tactical doctrine regarding casualties focuses on risk assessment and consequence mitigation. The concept of narrative appears throughout the most recent operational and strategic doctrine, but doctrine fails to bridge explicitly the gap between tactical and strategic viewpoints on casualties. The final section of the monograph will introduce the term "operational narrative" as a means of connecting these two aspects of doctrine.

Limitations to the Monograph

Before continuing, it is important to note that there are a number of limitations to the scope and utility of this monograph. It is very challenging to develop military theories that are appropriate in all time periods and strategic situations, so the following restrictions apply.

First, moral issues fall almost entirely outside the scope of this monograph. It is assumed, as a given, that leaders at all levels have a moral duty to safeguard their subordinates' lives to the maximum extent possible, while accomplishing the missions assigned to them. At the same time, all uniformed members of the military are subject to the concept of unlimited liability, meaning that they accept the risk of grievous injury and even death if required in the service of their nation.[3] While these concepts are clear from a moral perspective, they offer no guidance on how commanders should balance the risk of casualties against mission accomplishment, nor how friendly casualties impact mission success in different strategic contexts. Therefore, while the protection of soldiers for moral reasons is extremely important, it does not form an important piece of this monograph.

Second, the balance of casualty risk against strategic goals examined in this monograph is particular to conflicts of choice in the 21st century. Conflicts of choice are situations where Western states take the decision to deploy forces in support of limited strategic and political objectives, rather than wars of national survival. In the latter type of conflict the equation between friendly combat casualties and strategy leans heavily toward strategic considerations–the lives of soldiers are the price nations pay for their survival against external aggression. This is not to say that the limited types of conflict pursued by Western states are somehow unworthy, but merely to highlight the problem set that this monograph focuses on. The most important facet of this is that conflicts of choice are discretionary, and as such the decisions taken within them are much more

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[3] Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 1, *The Army* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 2-6.

discretionary in nature as well.[4] This difference greatly impacts narrative, and by extension the way casualties impact narrative.

Further, the way that narratives are used to justify the commitment of military forces to operations, and the way those narratives change, are crucial to understanding the strategic context that casualty risk decisions are made in and therefore are extremely important to this monograph. As an example, when the narrative around the invasion of Iraq in 2003 concentrated on the threat of weapons of mass destruction and the Hussein regime's ties with terrorism, warfare with Iraq was of national necessity.[5] In this context the risk of casualties in support of strategic goals is quite simple: protect soldiers to the extent possible, but above all else ensure the achievement of the mission. However, when a narrative evolves beyond traditional military victory, as it did in the case of Iraq, then the balancing of casualties versus goals becomes much more challenging. It is the latter context that is the focus of this monograph.

Third, this monograph is appropriate only for the examination of Western militaries based on democratic political regimes. A significant component of the discussion rests on the idea of governments being democratically responsible to their citizens, since that responsiveness drives the creation and maintenance of government policy. Closely related to this limitation is the difference in cultural contexts between Western and non-Western nations, and the variation in values different cultures place on individual soldiers' lives. Western liberal democracies have generally similar military cultures and similar relationships between their militaries, their governments, and their people, so the findings of this monograph are broadly relatable within that group of countries.

Finally, the casualties that this monograph refers to are generally of the immediate, physical variety. An entire field of study exists around the long-term mental trauma inflicted on

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[4] Richard Haass, *War Of Necessity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009).

[5] Ibid.

participants in war, and understanding the mental health impacts of contemporary conflicts of choice is extraordinarily important. However, beyond the acknowledgement that casualty risk decisions made by commanders include casualties that may not be apparent until a later time, mental health generally falls outside of the scope of this monograph.

Casualty Aversion and Casualty Sensitivity

It has become axiomatic that Americans will not tolerate many body bags in the course of an intervention where vital interests are not at stake. There is no clear evidence for this conventional wisdom, however, and ample evidence to the contrary. What is crucial for maintaining public support is not casualties per se, but casualties in an inconclusive war, casualties that the public sees as being suffered indefinitely, for no clear, good, or achievable purpose.

–Richard K. Betts

To understand the interplay between casualties at the tactical level and those casualties' strategic impacts, it is necessary to investigate the popularly-held idea that voters in Western democracies are casualty-averse, resulting in Western governments that are unwilling to sustain casualties in wars where vital national interests are not at stake. Historical examples such as the conflicts in Lebanon, Somalia, and Kosovo seem to show that casualty aversion is a serious concern, and that public support for operations is contingent on low casualties.[6] Indeed, this idea is so widespread that it appears to form an element of adversary strategic thought. Taking the opposing view, some military leaders insist that casualty aversion is a myth, implicitly stating that they be simply left alone to accomplish military objectives without political interference.[7] In truth, the issue of casualty aversion is much more complex, demanding a much more nuanced interpretation. The body of research on the subject argues that Western voters are not casualty averse, but rather view casualties in a more sophisticated manner that is dependent on the policy objective of the intervention, the perceived likelihood of the intervention's success, and the cues of elite leaders.[8] Perhaps most importantly people see casualties in light of the narratives of

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[6] Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver and Jason Aaron Reifler, *Paying The Human Costs Of War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 10.

[7] See Timothy S. Mundy, "Casualty Aversion: Dispelling the Myth," (Monograph, US Army School of Advanced Military Studies, 2000). A series of School of Advanced Military Studies and Command and General Staff College monographs appeared in the latter part of the 1990s and early 2000s on this subject.

[8] Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 10.

conflicts, and use casualties as a gauge of the appropriateness and effectiveness of campaigns. In sum, citizens of Western democracies view casualties suffered for questionable reasons in a highly negative manner, but can understand losses suffered in order to achieve appropriate gains. This section of the monograph explores these distinctions.

The Casualty Aversion Myth

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a strong feeling that the populations of Western democracies, and most importantly the United States, are overly sensitive to casualties incurred in the course of military operations. As a result of the change in the types of conflicts that Western militaries would participate in, the minimization of casualties due to domestic political pressure came to be seen as the controlling norm.[9] The recollection of the Vietnam War, and the social upheaval caused by diminished support for the conflict, weighs heavily on military and decision makers who wish to ensure that strategic defeats do not overshadow tactical successes.[10] Additionally, spectacular casualty events such as the bombing of the United States Marine and French Army barracks in Beirut, Lebanon in 1983 and the failed raid in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1993, make military leaders cautious about the impact of casualties.[11] In both of these cases political leaders, preoccupied by negative impacts on domestic politics, ordered the precipitous withdrawal of American forces. In the 1999 NATO campaign against Serbia over the breakaway province of Kosovo, the Clinton administration focused on the avoidance of friendly casualties, to the point that military planners reportedly modified operations plans until war-

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[9] Edward N. Luttwak, "Toward Post-Heroic Warfare," *Foreign Affairs* May/June 1995.

[10] Benjamin C. Schwarz, *Casualties, Public Opinion & U.S. Military Intervention* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 1994), 3-4.

[11] Ibid.

gamed casualty estimates were zero.[12] In the lead-up to the Gulf war in 1990-1990, the media

raised serious concerns regarding the American public's ability to support a war that resulted in

large numbers of casualties. The previously mentioned examples of Vietnam, Lebanon, Somalia

and Kosovo were held up as proof that the American public had historically used casualties as the

overwhelmingly most important factor in determining support for military action.[13] There is

evidence that casualty estimates troubled senior political leaders, including President George

H.W. Bush, in the lead-up to the war, and as a result Bush sought to reassure the American public

that the Gulf War would not take the protracted form of the Vietnam War.[14]

       In parallel to the way that American military and political leaders express concern over

the public's stomach for combat losses, some of the United States' most committed enemies see

the issue as key. From Saddam Hussein to Slobodan Milošević to the ruling regime of North

Korea, a key component of propaganda and military strategy in recent conflicts has consistently

been the threat to cause massive casualties among Western troops, based on the understanding

that doing so would precipitate withdrawal.[15] Bosnian Serb Radovan Karadžić warned the West

that it was unable to "bear the pain" of intervention in Bosnia.[16] Osama bin Laden, in a *fatwa*

issued in 1996, made specific mention of the withdrawal of American forces from Lebanon and

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[12] Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 45.

[13] Richard Morin, "How Much War Will Americans Support?" *The Washington Post*, 2 September 1990, accessed 18 January 2015, http://search.proquest.com/docview/307313493?accountid=28992.

[14] Steven Casey, *When Soldiers Fall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 206.

[15] Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 6.

[16] Schwarz, viii.

Somalia, holding them up as examples of the United States' unwillingness to fight and contrasting it with the *jihad* he proposed.[17]

Given this background, it is obvious that there exists some sensitivity to casualties amongst the public. However, the specifics of that sensitivity are much more complex, and change over time. In both the Korean and Vietnam Wars, once the respective conflicts became protracted and featured high casualties, there was a change in the percentage of people who regretted initial involvement, but "very little movement in the percentage of Americans polled who wished the United States to withdraw from the conflict."[18] In both cases, one of the most oft-used poll questions was "Given what you know now, do you approve of the decision to go to war?" The reply during both wars was a dwindling in positive responses over time in the face of mounting casualties. However, this question is largely irrelevant to strategic and operational decision-makers, since it asks the retrospective question of support for the original intervention, but fails to ask about the prospect of withdrawing from the conflict in the future.[19] In the Korean War example, the percentage of polling respondents who favored "withdrawal" in the face of an extraordinary increase in casualties fluctuated only between twelve and seventeen percent, despite the fact that approval for the intervention itself dropped from sixty six to approximately forty percent.[20] In the example of the Vietnam War, July 1965 marked the commitment of American ground troops. Between that month and August 1968, approval of the intervention had dropped precipitously (sixty two percent to thirty two percent) in the face of large numbers of casualties while the percentage in favor of withdrawal remained almost unchanged, at between nine and

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[17] Osama bin Laden, "Bin Laden's Fatwa," *PBS Newshour*, last modified 2015, accessed January 28, 2015, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military-july-dec96-fatwa_1996/.

[18] Schwarz, ix.

[19] Ibid., 8-9.

[20] Ibid., 10.

twelve percent.[21] In both examples, there is evidence that a significant percentage of Americans actually supported escalation of the conflict in the face of rising casualties, instead of the commonly-held view that the voting public overwhelmingly supported withdrawal.[22]

This difference between support for commencing wars and support for withdrawing from them is key, both in terms of understanding public opinion and for acknowledging the difference in what matters to strategic versus operational leaders. While it may be important for strategic and political leaders to understand public opinion regarding the appropriateness of the conflict, from the sense of operationally connecting tactical actions with strategic effects it is much more important to understand the criteria that would necessitate withdrawal.

Similarly, the United States' involvement in Somalia offers an example of how public opinion polling may be misconstrued to serve the casualty-aversion hypothesis. It is important to recognize that US domestic support for the mission had dropped significantly *before* the battle that saw eighteen Rangers killed and eighty wounded on October 3-4, 1993. After the battle public support did not evaporate overnight–it was already at a low level and, crucially, there existed agreement on a pull out by leaders of both major political parties. So, political elites from both sides of the partisan divide had a role in leading public opinion toward withdrawal–they differed mainly in the timeframe for doing so and the Clinton administration elected to withdraw relatively quickly.[23]

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[21] Schwarz, 10-11.

[22] Ibid., 12-16.

[23] Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 38.

Casualty Sensitivity

        The examples described above demonstrate that a more nuanced relationship between public opinion and casualties exists than simply an aversion to combat losses. In reality, a set of variables interact with one another to drive public opinion, with casualties serving as only one variable that has a differing importance from conflict to conflict and over time within a single campaign. Today, scholarly consensus is that the public is more level-headed than the casualty aversion hypothesis gives it credit for. [24] Generally, a rational cost-benefit equation drives public opinion, strongly influenced by the cues of elite leaders and the consensus between them.[25] The public asks itself whether the benefits of the intervention and its prospects for success are great enough, balanced against the expected or actual costs, including casualties.[26]

        First, the type of military operation–alternatively termed the "primary policy objective"–under consideration is a strong influencer. Based on the research of Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler, public support is highest for security missions such as counter-terrorism, followed by humanitarian missions such as the prevention of ethnic cleansing and foreign-policy related missions such as the protection of resource flows.[27] This research also demonstrated that in advance of a mission, the prospect of incurring an indeterminate number of casualties does not significantly alter the public's level of support. When surveys use specific numbers of potential casualties, however, public opinion often varies. That is, the experiment suggests that casualties in the abstract are a less important variable than others such as the policy objective sought in the military intervention. It is important to note that this experiment was limited to overall support to

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[24] Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 10.

[25] Ibid., 15.

[26] Eric V. Larsen, *Casualties and Consensus* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1996), xviii.

[27] Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 38-40.

a mission in the future not the respondents' desire to end a mission early in the face of casualties.[28]

Second, the overall expectation of success is highly important in swaying public opinion, and relates strongly to the public's acceptance of casualties. Support for missions without clear end states, and thus without objectively clear benchmarks for success, is affected much more strongly by casualties than support for those where mission accomplishment is easily described.[29] This stands to reason, and may be associated with mission speed and a layman's understanding of military missions. Campaigns with clear geographic goals such as the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, the capture of Baghdad in 2003, or even the seizure of key locations in Panama by the US military in 1989 historically have had much stronger public support than those with more nebulous objectives such as pacifying an area or supporting counterinsurgency. Likewise, missions with clearly defined goals are generally faster, mitigating the nearly inevitable decline in public support that takes place over time.[30]

Third, the importance of leadership and the cues of elites (primarily political elites) are keys to understanding public opinion on war. The public draws a great deal of its guidance for supporting military operations from the leaders it trusts. This obvious fact highlights an important variable in studying public support for wars: partisan politics. Massachusetts Institute of Technology political scientist Adam Berinsky makes an important argument that the study of public opinion in war, without matching it to public opinion in domestic politics, is of very limited value.[31] Partisan politics forms a lens through which the factors described above are

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[28] Larsen, 101.

[29] Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 38-40.

[30] Larsen, 123.

[31] Adam J. Berinsky, *In Time Of War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 5.

assessed, as convincingly demonstrated by research on public opinion and the Iraq War. In Berinsky's research partisan political affiliation greatly impacted the way research respondents conceptualized the war and their views on casualties in it.[32] Eric V. Larsen remarked upon this phenomenon of partisan cuing, and noted that it is not just a unidirectional, top-down process of telling people what to think. Rather, the process of elite cuing is the natural byproduct of individuals seeking to understand complex issues and looking to leaders they find credible for help in developing their own position. Individuals then choose whether the specific position is the one they agree with.[33] This relationship is reciprocal. Political leaders greatly influence the views of the populace, at least those members of the populace that identify themselves with the leaders' political persuasion. At the same time, in a democracy the views of the voting public matter a great deal to the political leaders, and so the public influences the viewpoints of elites at the same time. This mutual exchange is important to understanding how political elites respond to casualties, and by extension how they themselves support military plans.

Closely related to partisanship but not precisely the same, differences in views between elites also figure strongly into public opinion. Where there is general consensus on the necessity of military action, such as the bipartisan support eventually formed prior to the Gulf War in 1991, there is a strong likelihood that public opinion will be commensurately high, even in the face of casualties.[34] Just ahead of the ground conflict in February 1991, the US polling populace accepted that it was likely that the campaign would last for months (sixty two percent approval) and that the casualties would be high (eighty two percent approval) but stated overwhelmingly that they were in favor of the conflict (eighty three percent approval).[35] As previously noted, the Somalia

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[32] Berinsky, 78.

[33] Larsen, 75.

[34] Larsen, 75-79.

[35] Schwarz, 20-22.

mission offers another example of the importance of consensus. By the time that the Battle of Mogadishu took place and the decision taken to remove US forces shortly thereafter, there was broad-based bipartisan consensus that withdrawal was the appropriate course of action, echoed in public opinion across the political spectrum.[36] Conversely, where there is elite dissensus enduring divisions can develop as to the appropriateness of the conflict, and public support that is brittle and easily eroded by negative events such as combat casualties.[37]

War Narratives

The element uniting the disparate components that make up casualty sensitivity is the war narrative. A war narrative constructs the meaning of military action, and in doing so shows why military force is the appropriate response to a public policy problem. After the commencement of military operations, the war narrative serves to interpret and explain events as they occur, in such a way as to demonstrate continually both that the use of force remains appropriate, and that the military strategy chosen remains feasible.[38] If the events that occur fail to correspond logically with the war narrative, then that narrative itself is vulnerable to collapse. In the event this happens a new narrative can form as a replacement, and that narrative may be at odds with the original policy objectives that necessitated the use of military force.[39] Casualty sensitivity is a strong example of this problem. Casualties are objectively measurable costs of military operations that the public weighs against the potential benefits described by the war narrative. While this value judgement continues to be reasonable, public support remains intact and strategic success remains

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[36] Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 38.

[37] Larson, xxii.

[38] Jeffrey J. Kubiak, *War Narratives and the American National Will In War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 30.

[39] Ibid., 33.

possible. Conversely, when the war narrative and the casualties suffered are at odds, then the war narrative is undermined and public support suffers, with negative impacts on strategic goals. The most important problem that war narratives present to military professionals is that they fall outside of the military's ability to completely control. While senior military leaders may be able to influence the development of war narratives, fundamentally they are political creations. Once political leaders determine the strategic objectives they seek, operational leaders must make tactical decisions that support the achievement of those objectives as well as reinforcing the war narrative.

The challenge to operational planners in the types of conflicts discussed in this monograph, is to recognize in advance those risks that will render harm to the war narrative, and by extension to the national will. The term "operational narrative" offers a means of conceptualizing the connection between war narratives and tactical actions by military forces, in the same way that the doctrinal term "operational art" describes the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose in support of strategic goals.[40] An operational narrative unifies and gives meaning to tactical actions, by connecting those actions with the strategic narrative provided by senior military and political leadership to the public. In most instances, the process of military planning creates an operational narrative to explain the connecting logic of tactical actions. However, in some instances commanders and their staffs fail to put the time and effort into understanding the way that the operational narrative connects with and either supports or undermines the war narrative. The following case studies offer examples of the difference this can make.

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[40] Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 9.

Case Studies

Operation *Al Fajr* – the Second Battle of Fallujah

   The Second Battle of Fallujah in November 2004 offers an example of how narrative and combat casualties interact. Despite some of the most intense combat of the Iraq War, *Al Fajr* illustrates how commanders can develop an operational narrative that synchronizes with and supports the war narrative, and in so doing connect their tactical decisions to strategic ends in effective ways.[41] Despite fierce fighting, the casualties taken fit within a logical operational narrative supported by senior military and political leaders. As a result, those casualties did not undermine public support to the war effort.

   In late 2003 the security situation throughout Iraq steadily worsened and sectarian violence threatened to erupt into civil war. The United States military's intent was to hand security over to Iraqi forces as soon as possible, to set the conditions for withdrawal from the country. For the most part, US forces had moved to large bases and minimized patrolling, although attacks on coalition forces continued to take place. In Fallujah, approximately eighty kilometers west of Baghdad, the situation took a strong turn for the worse on March 31, 2004. On that date, insurgents ambushed a convoy operated by the private security firm Blackwater in the center of the city, killing four contractors and desecrating their remains. News crews captured their death and the aftermath and broadcast the images internationally.[42] The media immediately drew parallels between the deaths in Fallujah and the Battle of Mogadishu in Somalia in 1993, and political leaders both in the United States and in Iraq put pressure on the military to take action.[43]

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[41] See Richard D. Camp, *Operation Phantom Fury* (Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2009), for an overview of the operation as a whole.

[42] Camp, 1.

[43] Francis J. West, *No True Glory* (New York: Bantam Books, 2005), 59.

Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, Commander Coalition Joint Task Force 7, ordered an immediate attack into the city, despite protests from United States Marine leaders on the ground that doing so could provoke further violence.[44] Operation Vigilant Resolve commenced on April 5, 2004, and resulted in heavy fighting as the Marines pushed into Fallujah. Simultaneously, insurgent activity increased throughout the country. The international news media covered the intense combat in Fallujah and elsewhere in Iraq extensively, and highlighted the potential for civilian casualties. Because of the short planning time for the operation it was impossible to prepare sufficiently the information environment. As a result, the narrative of civilian deaths and excessive force by Coalition forces became the dominant message.[45] In the face of mounting pressure, political leaders in the United States and Iraq ordered the suspension of offensive operations on April 8, a decision that was exceptionally controversial amongst US military leaders.[46] Marine leaders, who were responsible for Fallujah, felt strongly that the narrative created by this action was one of running away in the face of difficulties, and would represent a strategic defeat for the United States.[47] Nonetheless, the offensive was stopped and US military forces withdrawn from the city in favor of Iraqi Army units.

By the fall of 2004, Fallujah was the epicenter of the insurgency in Iraq, and was representative of a steadily worsening security situation throughout the country.[48] Iraq had regained its sovereignty on June 24, and the Interim Prime Minister, Ayad Allawi, felt strongly

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[44] Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 332-333.

[45] Thomas F. Metz et al, "Massing Effects in the Information Domain: A Case Study in Aggressive Information Operations," *Military Review* (October 2006): 106, accessed March 5, 2015, http://search.proquest.com/docview/225304967?accountid=28992.

[46] Camp, 79-82.

[47] Ricks, 343.

[48] Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 25.

that an operation against the insurgents in Fallujah was necessary to pave the way for national elections, scheduled for January 2005.[49] Fall 2004 was a politically sensitive time in the United States as well, due to the hotly contested presidential election race. In this context Coalition leaders took the decision to execute a clearing operation against insurgents in Fallujah, and tasked Major General Richard Natonski and the 1st Marine Division, reinforced by units of the United States, British, and Iraqi Armies, to execute Operation *Al Fajr*.[50]

This time, planners had the opportunity to treat the attack on Fallujah as a deliberate operation, with extensive efforts made to prepare both militarily and politically. A great deal of time and effort was spent in preventing civilian casualties from becoming the dominant narrative as they had been during Operation Vigilant Resolve, and likewise pains were taken to prepare for the inevitable friendly casualties. Commanders and staffs at the division and corps levels understood that an information battle would take place alongside the physical battle in Fallujah, and placed significant emphasis on ensuring success in both domains as part of the military decision-making process.[51] Political support was also critical given the situation in the United States, and President Bush provided his direct backing to the operation despite understanding the

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[49] Camp, 117-119.

[50] Lieutenant General Richard F. Natonski, USMC Retired, Commander 1st Marine Division during Operation *Al Fajr*, oral history provided to author, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, January 9, 2015. Originally, the operation was codenamed Phantom Fury, and that name is still used in a variety of sources. However, Prime Minister Allawi asked that its official name be changed to *Al Fajr* (New Dawn in English) to evoke the idea of a new beginning that democratic elections would symbolize for Iraq.

[51] Metz et al, 107.

strong potential for casualties.[52] Prime Minister Allawi was also briefed on the implications of the attack and concurred with President Bush's support for finishing the fight once it was started.[53]

This oversight was key for two reasons: First, it provided military leadership with an assurance that leaders at the highest level of politics understood the cost-benefit equation that the upcoming battle represented, and would support operations despite the likelihood of severe casualties. Obviously the risk was still present, but the support of the President allowed military leadership to accept calculated risk in completing their missions. General Casey, Commander Multinational Force–Iraq (MNC-I), and Lieutenant General Metz, Commander Multinational Corps–Iraq, were able to assume operational risk in moving forces from other parts of the country to assist with the Fallujah operation. Major General Natonski was able to assume tactical risk in support of ending the operation as quickly as possible. After a prolonged period of preparation of the battlespace through a variety of means, Natonski deliberately chose a fast, violent assault in order to leverage the capabilities inherent in the American combined-arms team.[54]

At the same time as President Bush's affirmation of support helped military leaders, the military operation helped the President. Since the fall of Baghdad–and President Bush's infamous speech on the aircraft carrier decorated with the "Mission Accomplished" banner–the US effort in Iraq had been struggling with maintaining its narrative in the face of a growing insurgency and sectarian violence.[55] Throughout the early part of 2004 the situation had steadily worsened, with a

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[52] Richard F. Natonski, oral history provided to author, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, January 9, 2015. LtGen Natonski was not made aware of President Bush's direct support to the operation until years later.

[53] Camp, 153.

[54] Richard F. Natonski, oral history provided to author, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, January 9, 2015.

[55] The New York Times, "Bush Steps Away From Victory Banner," *The New York Times*, October 29, 2003, accessed April 2, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/29 /politics/29BANN.html

commensurate rise in coalition casualties and a drop in public support at home. The Fallujah mission offered the chance to reframe the vulnerable mission narrative from one of an insurgency growing out of control to a much more traditional, terrain-based, insurgents-vs-Marines explanation of the situation, understandable by the public at home.[56] Above all, given the great capability of the military force employed in Fallujah there was little doubt about the final outcome of the battle, even if it would be costly.

When the attack on Fallujah commenced on November 7, 2004, the Marines had to reduce sequentially an extremely well-prepared series of defenses. The insurgents fought tenaciously, creating a battle described by some observers as the most difficult faced by the United States military since the end of the Vietnam War.[57] Coalition forces retook the city from insurgent control after ten days, although extensive cleanup and reconstruction would be necessary given the level of fighting. US casualties were fifty-four dead and 425 wounded, a testament to the ferocity of the fighting.[58] While the physical battle was raging, the information campaign planned by Multinational Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) was pursued aggressively. Extensive use was made of photographic evidence to document the insurgent use of religious and cultural sites for fighting, and to highlight the atrocities committed by insurgents. This recognition of the connection between tactical information operations and strategic political impacts informed the entire MNC-I plan.[59]

Despite the severity of the fighting and the number of casualties taken, the attack on Fallujah had a negligible impact on American popular support for the war in Iraq. According to

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[56] Larsen, 123.

[57] Ricks, 399.

[58] Ibid., 400.

[59] Metz et al, 107.

Gallup polling during the period, the number of Americans who felt that the Coalition was winning versus the insurgency rose during the fighting, while the number of people who supported the invasion as a whole dropped only slightly.[60] The maintenance of public opinion supports the idea that the public makes a cost-benefit analysis of casualties versus the importance of the objective sought, and is not overly sensitive to casualties on their own.[61] In the case of Fallujah the narrative created at the operational level, and supported by strategic leaders, offered an explanation for casualties in advance of the battle. The efforts by MNC-I and 1st Marine Division to understand their narrative and work to protect it played a critical role in maintaining public support for the mission.

Before concluding, it must be noted that the Second Battle of Fallujah's effect in the broader scope of the counterinsurgency in Iraq is much more in doubt than the immediate, mostly positive impact on the narrative described above. The successful clearance of insurgents from Fallujah did not end the insurgency; indeed it did not end it in the context of Fallujah itself in the long term. The destruction wrought on the city and its inhabitants, and the underperformance of planned rebuilding efforts in the weeks and months following, meant that the tactical gains achieved by operation *Al Fajr* were short-lived.[62] However, what the operation clearly demonstrates is the way that operational commanders can frame tactical actions within a strategic context through the careful development and cultivation of an operational narrative. If this happens, commanders can make better-informed risk decisions and mitigate the potential that friendly combat casualties undermine success at the strategic level.

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[60] Gallup Inc., "Iraq Gallup Historical Trends", Gallup.Com, last modified 2015, accessed March 3, 2015, http://www.gallup.com/poll/1633/iraq.aspx.

[61] Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler, 165.

[62] Ricks, 405.

Operation Medusa and Canadian Casualties in Southern Afghanistan

In contrast to the example of Fallujah, the narrative that Canadian senior military and political leaders built around Canadian Army operations in Afghanistan in 2006 contrasted badly with the casualties that resulted from intense fighting against Taliban insurgents in the summer and early fall of that year. This contrast called the government's narrative on Afghanistan into doubt, and public support for the mission as a whole plummeted. Despite some tactical successes, a concerted effort after the fact by the government of Canada to adapt the narrative, and widespread backing of the troops themselves, the combat mission never recovered public support.

Canada participated in the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001-2002, providing special operations forces, air support, and eventually a task force based on an infantry battalion. While these troops engaged in some combat, most of the casualties that the Canadians took in Afghanistan during this period were the result of a mistaken bombing by a United States Air Force F-16, on April 18, 2002. While this mistake horrified the Canadian public and precipitated a public enquiry, it had little impact on support for the mission as a whole. As a result, Canada's first involvement in Afghanistan did not necessitate facing the impact of casualties to a great degree.[63]

The Canadian Army returned to Afghanistan in 2003 as a significant contributor to NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul. United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1386 authorized The ISAF to provide security in the Kabul area so that the Afghan Interim Authority and the United Nations could operate freely.[64] The Kabul mission was politically contentious in Canada, the Canadian government saw it as a way to avoid

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[63] Janice Gross Stein and J. Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), 19.

[64] United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1386 (2001)* (New York: United Nations, 2001).

committing troops to the United States-led invasion of Iraq.[65] Canadian public opinion was

generally positive toward the mission, seeing it as a natural extension of the peacekeeping

missions that had dominated Canadian Forces operations in the 1990s.[66] In October 2003 UNSCR

1510 authorized the staged expansion of ISAF beyond Kabul to the remainder of Afghanistan,

paving the way for ISAF to eventually replace the United States' Operation Enduring Freedom.[67]

ISAF planned to expand in four stages: to the north, west, south, and east of Afghanistan in

sequence. Northern and western Afghanistan were regarded as reasonably safe, while southern

and eastern Afghanistan were deemed much more dangerous due to the presence of Pashtun tribes

that had been the historical basis of the Taliban. In order to support ISAF's scheduled transition

to the south, the Canadian government took the decision to commit a robust force to Kandahar in

spring 2006. This force included a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) based in Kandahar

City that had been operating since August 2005, and was charged with the coordination of

Canadian and international development efforts.[68] Added to this capability was a battalion-sized

infantry task force for security throughout the province.

During the delicate period of transition between OEF and ISAF, Canada supplied a

brigade-sized headquarters commanded by a brigadier general. [69] The differences in mission

between the PRT and the infantry battle group reflected the disjointed communication of the

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[65] Stein and Lang, 73.

[66] Charles A Miller, *Endgame For The West In Afghanistan?* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Instit72ute, 2010), 70.

[67] United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1510 (2003)* (New York: United Nations, 2003).

[68] International.gc.ca, 'History of Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan 2001–2014', last modified 2014, accessed February 28, 2015, http://www.international.gc.ca/afghanistan/history-histoire.aspx?lang=eng.

[69] Stein and Lang, 182-188.

Kandahar mission to the Canadian public. The Minister of Defence, Bill Graham, stressed in speaking engagements in 2005 that the focus of the mission was reconstruction and development. At the same time the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier, concentrated on the counterinsurgency aspects of the mission and the potential for the Canadian Army to become engaged in combat.[70] This dissensus over the policy objective would end up being harmful to the new mission's narrative as a whole once it began.

The Canadian mission in Kandahar commenced in early 2006 under the command of Brigadier General David Fraser. Almost immediately, Fraser's headquarters discovered that an insurgency remained active in southern Afghanistan, and that the forces available to combat it in Kandahar and Helmand provinces were insufficient to provide security throughout the region. The Canadian battle group, built around 1st Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (1PPCLI) participated in fierce combat operations throughout the summer and absorbed numerous casualties from both insurgent small arms and improvised explosive devices (IED).[71]

ISAF transition officially took place on July 31, 2006, with Brigadier General Fraser maintaining command of NATO forces in Regional Command (South). At nearly the same time the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment (1RCR) replaced the 1PPCLI battle group. By August it became apparent that Taliban forces in the area of Kandahar City were intent on transitioning to a form of conventional warfare, seizing and defending a group of villages in the Pashmul district. In response, Fraser's command developed Operation Medusa, a brigade-sized offensive operation designed to clear Taliban from the area. The gravity of the situation was not lost on ISAF Headquarters in Kabul, where the operation was designated the ISAF main effort.[72] Operation Medusa commenced on September 2, and developed into a remarkably difficult battle,

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[70] Stein and Lang, 200-202.

[71] Bernd Horn and Emily Spencer, *No Easy Task* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2012), 170-171.

[72] Ibid., 178.

against Taliban dug in with a well-prepared battalion-sized, mutually supporting defensive position, making good use of villages and compounds to achieve cover and concealment. The attack quickly turned into a highly conventional series of deliberate obstacle breaches that lasted for days. Operation Medusa officially ended on 17 Sep 2006, but follow-operations continued for weeks thereafter.[73] Senior NATO leaders considered the operation a tactical success, and were effusive in their praise of the Canadian-led operation.[74]

Operation Medusa saw five Canadian Army troops killed, and approximately forty more seriously wounded.[75] These casualties, combined with the nineteen troops killed since the start of the Kandahar mission, were a shock to the Canadian public.[76] Public support for the Afghanistan mission dropped sharply, from fifty seven percent support in May to forty four percent support in early November. Of that number, twenty one percent were strongly supportive of the mission. According to the same poll, the percentage of Canadians who would oppose an extension to the combat mission climbed to fifty eight percent, with only nineteen percent indicating strong support.[77] Public support never recovered, and stabilized approximately forty percent by December 2007.[78] While complexities such as regional politics played a role, analysis of the

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[73] Horn and Spencer, 178-187.

[74] Ibid., 188-190.

[75] Ibid., 187.

[76] Icasualties website. Icasualties.org, 'Icasualties'. Last modified 2015. Accessed March 8, 2015. http://icasualties.org/OEF/Nationality.aspx?hndQry=Canada.

[77] Ipsos-Reid national survey November 4, 2006. Miller (2010) asserts that different polling firms found support as high as 70% in February 2006, but that data is not available to the author.

[78] Miller, 79.

polling data indicates clearly that casualties influenced Canadians' perception of the Afghan mission.[79]

The reasons for this influence closely match those introduced earlier in this monograph. First, the population did not understand the primary policy objective of Canadian operations in Afghanistan. Over the course of public debate, as many as four different narratives for Canadian involvement became apparent: a humanitarian narrative focused on reconstruction, a counterterrorist narrative focused on the Taliban and Al Qaeda, a narrative of retribution based on the September 11 attacks, and a reputation narrative based on the idea that Canada supports its allies.[80] The Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan, charged with research and public consultations before making recommendations to government in 2008, noted the ambiguity of the mission. "While public support for Canadian troops is strong, Canadians have been uncertain about Canada's evolving mission in Afghanistan. To put things bluntly, Governments from the start of Canada's Afghan involvement have failed to communicate with Canadians with balance and candor about the reasons for Canadian involvement, or about the risks, difficulties and expected results of that involvement."[81]

Second, the tactical success earned by Operation Medusa was transitory, and the overall prospect of success for the Canadian Army was difficult to communicate to the Canadian populace. While Canadian troops earned praise for their success in the short term, the accomplishments of summer 2006 did not translate into a generally improved security situation in

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[79] Jean-Christophe Boucher, "Evaluating the 'Trenton Effect': Canadian Public Opinion And Military Casualties In Afghanistan (2006–2010)", *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no. 2 (2010): 237-258.

[80] Miller, 82.

[81] John Manley, *Independent Panel On Canada's Future Role In Afghanistan* (Ottawa: Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan, 2008), 20.

Kandahar Province.[82] As a result, Canadians were unable to compare the objective reality of the casualties taken with a measurable military result. As a consequence the narrative of the mission was severely undermined. The issue of short-lived tactical success effected Operation *Al Fajr*, but the greater issues of the insurgency throughout Iraq in the months that followed overshadowed the problems that returned to Fallujah.

Finally, elite leadership offered inconsistent views of the conflict, rendering the overall war narrative suspect. As has been noted already, deep differences existed between the way that the Defence Minister and the Chief of Defence Staff described the mission in advance of the Kandahar deployment, despite a shared knowledge that there was a likelihood of casualties. As a result, when casualties taken throughout 2006 were greater than expected by either the Government or the Canadian Forces, there was confusion and a lack of unity of response, which did little to support the narrative. In the same vein, the climate in the Canadian Parliament consisting of a minority Conservative government carrying out a mission originally authorized by a minority Liberal government, further confused the narrative.[83] This is a strong example of the way that war policies are reflective of domestic political considerations, as noted previously.[84]

In sharp contrast to the example offered by operations in Fallujah, Canadian military and political leaders failed to understand the impact of combat casualties on the Canadian public's impressions of the conflict. In effect, the operational narrative changed faster than the war narrative was able to adapt to it, resulting in a discontinuity between the war narrative and the combat that Canadian troops faced, illustrated clearly by a sharp rise in combat casualties. Little attention appears to have been paid to the synchronization of the operational narrative with the

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[82] Horn and Spencer, 191-192.

[83] Stein and Lang, 208, 230-231.

[84] Berinsky, 5

war narrative, and as a result the focus of Operational Medusa seems to have been squarely on the achievement of tactical success on the ground, to the expense of the operation's possibly negative strategic impacts at home. Canadian leaders seemed reactive to casualties taken throughout 2006, and were surprised both by the strength of the insurgency they faced and by the way that combat operations consumed personnel and materiel.[85] This sense of surprise inevitably translated to the Canadian public's reaction to casualties, and from there to diminished support for the mission as a whole.

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[85] Stein and Lang, 241-242.

Doctrine

Tactical Doctrine

Present Western military doctrine concerning casualties focusses overwhelmingly on the concept of risk management. Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0 links the concept of risk closely with judgment in commanders, acknowledging that commanders must accept varying degrees of risk in order to create tactical opportunities.[86] However, the mechanism for doing so looks downward at tactical risk management and mitigation techniques, entirely avoiding the way that tactical risk connects with strategic goals. Recognizing this, it is still worth examining tactical doctrine relating to casualty risk, to evaluate how that doctrine could support narrative at higher levels.

Historically, risk management has its origins in safety programs, and the processes described in risk management doctrine reflect that lineage.[87] Broadly, risk management consists of two major subsets: the identification and mitigation of risks themselves before the fact, and actions taken to moderate negative impacts after the fact. During the military decision-making process (MDMP), US Army doctrine calls for the use of the Army's risk management model throughout the process as a means of identifying, accounting for and addressing risks. The model encompasses five steps: the identification of hazards; the assessment of hazards to determine risk; the development of controls and the making of risk decisions; the implementation of controls; and supervision and evaluation.[88] The most important step of the process is in risk decision-making,

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[86] Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 2-9.

[87] Field Manual (FM) 5-19, *Composite Risk Management* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), preface.

[88] Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 5-19, 1-3 *Risk Management* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 1-3. release of ATP 5-19 in April 2014 makes note of the removal of "composite" from doctrinal risk management usage, despite offering no indication

where commanders evaluate the residual risk that remains after mitigation measures. While the mission variables of mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops, time available and civilian considerations (METT-TC) are offered as guides to the identification of hazards, tactical risk management doctrine remains biased towards relatively simple, easily quantifiable threats such as climatic conditions, disease and preventable accidents. It is much more challenging to fully understand and visualize casualty threats in a complex combat environment and completely account for them, especially during the compressed timelines often associated with the military decision making process. In several cases tactical doctrine reminds commanders to "accept no unnecessary risks" without offering any guidance on determining necessity at all.[89]

More global risk-mitigation measures attempt to alleviate the impact of casualty events after they occur. These measures take a variety of forms across the warfighting functions, but are centered on the medical aspects of impact mitigation, from extra emergency training for certain percentages of non-medical troops, to the availability of casualty evacuation assets, to the relocation of medical treatment facilities to areas of expected patient density.[90] These measures are exceptionally important to individually wounded soldiers, and reflect revolutionary advances in tactical trauma care that coincide with the changes in the operational context addressed by this paper. In some ways these changes are profound: the percentage of American soldiers that survive wounding by enemy action has steadily increased in recent years, for a variety of reasons.[91] This reality relates to two significant aspects of casualties at the strategic level. First, a large number of personnel that would have been Killed in Action in previous conflicts are now

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[89] See ATP 5-19 *Risk Management*, 1-1 and Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-37 *Protection*, 1-7.

[90] Army Techniques Publication (ATP 4) 5-02.5, Casualty Care (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), 1-5.

[91] Goldberg, Matthew S, "Death and Injury Rates of U.S. Military Personnel in Iraq." *Military Medicine* 175, no. 4 (2010): 220-226.

merely Wounded in Action, with the ambiguity of severity of wounds that that designation offers and the lessened strategic/political impact associated with it.[92] Second, an expectation may have been created that the capabilities of Western militaries to care for wounded allows for less risk to personnel overall.

Joint and coalition doctrine closely mimics the US Army's focus on a risk management approach to combat casualties. Joint Publication (JP) 3-0 *Joint Operations* includes risk management as a subset of command and control, and uses the same definition and process model as Army doctrine does.[93] Similar to the Army's MDMP, JP 5-0 *Joint Planning* references risk assessment and mitigation during the Mission Analysis step of the Joint Operations Planning Process.[94] Of note, JP 5-0 also includes in the definition of the commander's intent the concept of *operational risk*, defined as ". . . aspects of the campaign or operation in which the commander will accept risk in lower or partial achievement or temporary conditions. It also describes areas in which it is not acceptable to accept such lower or intermediate conditions."[95] While not explicitly stated, if interpreted broadly this might provide a means for a commander to identify the strategic risks represented by combat casualties. Harmonizing the way risk is conceptualized in two ways in JP 5-0: as a set of tactical threats to be identified and mitigated, and as a component of an operational commander's intent. This offers some potential to bridge the doctrinal gap identified in this monograph.

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[92] Casey, 201.

[93] Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), III-16

[94] Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), IV-6.

[95] Ibid., III-17

Despite its name, the term *operational risk management* (ORM) as used by the United States Navy reflects almost exactly the same process as the Army uses for tactical risk management, and as such does not greatly aid operational commanders and staffs. The naval aviation community originally developed ORM, and as a result it is an adaptation of the safety-focused approach to risk noted above with respect to Army doctrine.[96]

While it is outside of the scope of this monograph to analyze multinational doctrine from a wide variety of countries, the author's nationality and the use of the Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF) experience in Afghanistan as a case study make it appropriate to include a brief review of CAF doctrine with regards to combat casualties and decision-making. Similar to the US Army and US joint doctrine, Canada utilizes a risk management approach, encompassing the same five steps (referred to as phases in the CAF version) found in Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 5-19 and JP 5-0.[97] Canadian joint doctrine states that risk management takes place throughout the Operational Planning Process, balanced against the time available for planning so as to permit the commander to make the most informed risk decisions possible.[98] CAF risk management doctrine cursorily addresses casualty risk as compared to strategic goals, noting that tactical military actions must be balanced against the other aspects of national power (diplomatic, informational and economic) to support overall success. During course of action (COA) development and selection, the criteria of acceptability includes the idea that ". . . tactical or operational advantage gained must justify the *potential* [emphasis added] cost in resources and casualties."[99]

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[96] James C. Tanner, "Operational Risk Management at the Operational Level of War" (paper, United States Naval War College, 1997).

[97] Canadian Armed Forces, B-GJ-005-502/FP-000 *Joint Doctrine for Risk Management*. (Ottawa, ON: Joint Doctrine Branch, 2007), 3-1 – 3-5.

[98] Ibid., 3-6.

[99] Canadian Armed Forces, B-GJ-005-502/FP-000 *Joint Doctrine for Risk Management*. (Ottawa, ON: Joint Doctrine Branch, 2007), 3-9.

Narrative in Doctrine

While tactical doctrine on casualty risk management is quite specific, the opposite end of the doctrinal gap analyzed in this monograph is much less clear. There is no specific guidance made to commanders in US or Canadian doctrine on how to assess the risk of friendly casualties against strategic outcomes. However, it is useful to examine how doctrine treats narratives, since war narratives are so central to this issue. US doctrine uses the term narrative in three senses. First, narrative features prominently in the context of counterinsurgency operations, and relates to the ideological and political narrative competition that takes place between insurgents and counterinsurgent forces. Narratives in this sense offer expressions of the organizing logic that insurgents use as a basis for their operations. Military forces conducting stability operations must understand the enemy's narrative and work to counteract it in order to mobilize successfully the civilian population against the insurgency.[100]

Second, narratives are descriptive. During the military decision-making process, a narrative describes the broad concept of a course of action.[101] In the Army Design Methodology (ADM), narrative construction is a key component of framing an operational environment and determining what problems exist in it, leading to the development of an operational approach. Narrative construction is a vital component of both understanding the environment, and of communicating that understanding to others.[102]

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[100] Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 1-14, 3-8, A-7.

[101] Army Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (ATTP) 5-0.1, *Commander and Staff Officer Guide* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 4-19.

[102] Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 2-5 - 2-7.

Finally, narrative is used in doctrine in an explanatory sense, as a component of inform and influence activities. In this sense, "A brief description of a commander's story used to visualize the effects the commander wants to achieve in the information environment to support and shape their operational environments."[103] In this sense narratives explain to domestic audiences what is happening in an operation through the medium of public affairs, and to persuade foreign audiences to support a particular course of action. US Army doctrine draws a clear legal distinction between informing a domestic population and influencing foreign ones.[104] While Canadian joint doctrine acknowledges the requirement to develop themes and messages as a component of information operations, the use of narrative as an explanatory tool is absent from doctrinal publications.[105]

The idea of narrative as discussed in this monograph relates most closely to the third sense. A war narrative must explain to a domestic audience what is happening in a theatre of operations, and must provide a coherent explanation of how the actions of military forces make sense within that context. With an appropriate narrative framework the events that take place during the course of operations make logical sense to observers.[106] However, a linkage between narrative and the effects of tactical actions is mostly absent from doctrine. Inform and influence activities doctrine makes passing note of how a contradiction between information-related messages can create a say-do gap and thus greatly undermine credibility. However, doctrine does not explore the ramifications of this issue.[107] At its base, this is the issue explored in this

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[103] Field Manual (FM) 3-13, *Inform and Influence Activities* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), 1-4.

[104] Ibid., 1-2.

[105] Canadian Armed Forces, B-GG-005-004/AF-010 *CF Information Operations*. (Ottawa, ON: Joint Doctrine Branch, 1998).

[106] Kubiak, 24

[107] FM 3-13, 3-6.

monograph: the way that friendly combat casualties may undermine the legitimacy of a war narrative if leaders fail to comprehend the connection between them.

Operational Narrative

The author proposes the term "operational narrative" as a means to describe the idea of connecting tactical actions with the war narrative, to give those tactical actions coherence and meaning. Critically, an operational narrative would allow commanders to make much more appropriate risk decisions during tactical planning. It is impossible to develop doctrine that would adequately fill the gap described above in a specific sense – there is no magic equation that can make combat casualties acceptable. So, the doctrinal response to this issue must take the form of a means of analyzing the situation and understanding what the strategic impacts of casualties might be. This analysis could take the form of a series of questions and sub-questions, asked throughout the planning process:

1. What is the war narrative?

    1a. What is the primary policy objective?

    1b. What is the likelihood of measurable success?

    1c. What is the view of political elites, and is there consensus that the war

        narrative is appropriate?

    1d. How durable is the war narrative?

    1e. What are the war narrative's sources of weakness and strength?

2. Based on the answers to the questions above, what level of allowance does the war

    narrative make for friendly casualties?

3. What is the operational narrative?

    3a. How divergent from the war narrative is the operational narrative?

    3b. Does the operational narrative include a high risk of casualties?

4. What is the potential impact to the war narrative if the operational narrative differs from it?

4a. Is it possible to mitigate the impact of the operational narrative's contradictions?

3b. What are the means available to mitigate the risk to the war narrative?

5. What residual risk remains, and is that residual risk acceptable?

This approach has an obvious resemblance to risk management doctrine, for good reason. Fundamentally, this process is an attempt at understanding the risk to the war narrative formed by friendly casualties. In the same way that risk management facilitates risk decision-making by commanders, risk analysis at the operational narrative level allows commanders to weigh the potential gains offered by a course of action against the potential threats to strategic success. By understanding those risks, commanders can make better-informed plans, choose more appropriately between alternative courses of action, or apply further effort to mitigation measures. With a clearer understanding of the strategic implications of casualties, commanders can produce better strategic outcomes.

The series of questions outlined above reflect an extremely wide set of variables with which an operational commander must contend. Asking questions about domestic policy preferences falls well outside the traditional conception of the focus of the operational level of war, and thus friendly casualties are a more a problem of strategic communication than of operational art. However, the reality of limited wars in the 21st century is that the lines between tactical events and strategic goals are blurry, and as a result an operational artist must comprehend an ever-widening set of influences on his or her operational setting. In this context combat casualties, inherently of a tactical nature, strongly impact the strategic environment, as demonstrated in the section on casualty sensitivity. Failing to seek understanding of the war narrative and how the operational narrative–informed in this case by casualties–impacts it means that commanders make risk decisions without critical perspective on the strategic goals their

decisions serve. In the first case study examined in this monograph, US Army and Marine Corps leaders clearly identified that the tactical action they were planning needed the support of a robust information operations (IO) plan, including influence activities in Iraq and inform activities in the United States, in advance of physical contact in Fallujah.[108] Guided by this understanding, they were able to make appropriate risk decisions that supported both their tactical plan and the war narrative. In contrast, that connection appears to be much less strong in the example of the Canadian Army in Afghanistan in 2006. While it is true that many of the shortcomings in communication existed at the senior military and political level in Canada, there does not seem to have been a recognition in Afghanistan that the discontinuity between the tactical situation and the narrative at home might be a serious strategic problem. As a result, operational leaders made risk decisions with a very tactical focus, potentially at the expense of at least one important strategic consideration: the national will.

Before concluding, it is worth noting that while this monograph has focused on friendly casualties as a potential source of vulnerability for a war narrative, the process described above for assessing risk is equally applicable to other aspects of operational planning. The most obvious example of this is *mission creep*. From time to time, military leaders encounter situations where expanding their mission to address larger influences on the operational environment seems appropriate. Each time this takes place it has the potential to threaten the coherence and logic of the war narrative. In such instances, the use of operational narrative risk assessment, as described above, offers the potential to help identify and understand the risk mission creep brings to the war narrative.

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[108] Metz et al, 110.

Conclusion

This monograph has explored the issue of combat casualties, within the context of limited wars fought by Western democracies in the 21st century. In turn, the examination of this issue has revealed the importance of understanding how narratives detract from or reinforce the views of domestic political audiences, a critical component of strategic success. Many military planners do not understand these issues fully, and present US and Canadian doctrine fails to address adequately the relationship between them. If commanders and staffs in operational headquarters appreciate the war narrative that has been developed to justify and explain their campaigns to domestic political audiences, they can make much more appropriate tactical risk management decisions. These decisions can have profound impacts on domestic will, and ultimately the chances they have of achieving strategic success. In some cases, what is an effective military operation from a tactical perspective carries with it so much risk of casualties that it could undermine strategic support entirely. In this case the operation should not be undertaken at all, or at least it must be rethought in order to mitigate risks appropriately. In other cases it may be only necessary to devote extra time to inform and influence activities in advance, to ensure that the risk of casualties is commensurate with the potential gains. In still other cases, the strategic impact of key tactical successes may mean that a high risk of casualties is perfectly justified. Whichever of these cases may be, what is critically important is that commanders and their staffs take the time to consider whether the tactical actions they plan are actually congruent with the war narratives that construct the strategic goals they work toward.

A potential tool for understanding this linkage is what the author has termed the "operational narrative," a concept closely related to operational art as defined in present US Army doctrine. In the same way that operational art serves a connective role between tactics and strategic aims, an operational narrative serves to give tactical actions meaning within the conceptual framework of a war narrative. An operational narrative that exists properly within a war narrative makes logical sense, and is durable in the face of the inevitable reverses suffered in

conflict. Conversely, an operational narrative that is at odds with the war narrative it is supposed to be subordinate to is fragile and vulnerable to failure and replacement. Commanders and staffs can use an adapted form of risk management to identify risks to the war narrative, and by extension to strategic success.

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